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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Guard hosts partnership program

By Maj. Orson Ward, public affairs officer

RAPID CITY – The South Dakota National Guard hosted an unprecedented gathering of international leaders last week in Rapid City with more than 50 participants attending last week's educational seminar that highlighted South Dakota's partnership with the country of Suriname.

"My expectations were high, but I can tell that they have been exceeded," said Ambassador Lisa Bobbi Schreiber-Hughes, U.S. ambassador to Suriname. "It's just been amazing!"

Developed in 1993 to help foster democracy throughout the world, the National Guard State Partnership Program helps to "build a bridge" between other countries and the U.S. by establishing mutual understandings and relationships on a grassroots level. Currently, 56 countries partnered with 47 American states and territories are participating in the program. South Dakota's partnership with Suriname was made official in August 2006.

Located on the northeast coast of South America, Suriname is the smallest independent South American country with just 63,037 square miles. Like South Dakota, its economy relies on agriculture, oil, lumber, and mining. Its government aims to expand its tourism opportunities.

The Rapid City event held at the Rushmore Plaza Holiday Inn brought together senior leadership from the state and Rapid City community to include Lt. Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Maj. Gen. Steven Doohen, the adjutant general for the South Dakota National Guard, and representatives from South Dakota government, businesses, universities, and tourism industry.

Even though the National Guard plays a key role in bringing the program participants together, the strength of the program is within the civil-to-civil relationships, according to Schreiber-Hughes.

“South Dakota and Suriname have been visionary enough to start a civil-to-civil relationship at the very beginning; the drum I’ve always been beating,” she said. “If you want to look at how to develop a partnership that is a more civil society focused program - look at the South Dakota-Suriname partnership.”

The three-day educational program also brought guests from Suriname to include the Suriname Ambassador to the U.S., Suriname Ambassador to the United Nations, and representatives from the South American country’s departments of trade, foreign relations, education and defense.

“I did not know what to expect of South Dakota, but I’ll tell you I am impressed,” said Mauro Tuur, permanent secretary for Suriname’s Ministry of Trade and Industry. “There are tremendous opportunities, a number of areas where we can achieve success.”

Tuur said one of these areas is in the tourism industry, but he also mentioned the ways both Suriname and South Dakota can work together in education, trade, and medical services.

“I’m talking about the export of buffalo and beef to Suriname,” he said. “So there is a lot of work to be done.”

Ruben Soetosenojo, the permanent secretary for Suriname’s Ministry of Education, said one of his goals is to find ways to improve educational opportunities within the Suriname’s interior, or jungle regions, where the drop out rate is high and there is a shortage of qualified teachers.

“We want to lift up our basic education because this is where we have the most problems,” said Soetosenojo. “The interior is a big problem. The facilities are not there. You have to go by boat to medical facilities, so safety is an issue, and that makes it hard for qualified people to make it to the interior.”

Soetosenojo will go back to Suriname with more understanding of what South Dakota has to offer as well as a lasting impression of the Rushmore state’s hospitality.

“The way the people here in South Dakota have welcomed us has been very warm – it felt like home,” he said. “I think it’s a great program for sustainable peace.”

The acting permanent secretary for Suriname’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jane Aarland-Nanhu, said building relationships with other countries is important and the notion of the state partnership can take this relationship in several different directions.

“As far as the workshop, it was something I was very glad to see, and it was an enriching experience for me,” said Aarland-Nanhu. “What really impressed me was the dedication of the people at the Crazy Horse Monument. They have a dream, and they want to see it through. When I get back to Suriname, I will give them my positive impression of the development of the South Dakota relationship.”

Dennis Kamperveen, permanent secretary for Suriname's Ministry of Defense, has been engaged in making the program a reality since 2001.

"It's an opportunity to work close together with military," said Kamperveen. "In Suriname, the military and police are not close together. I believe this program can help make them come closer together so they can better protect the country."

Kamperveen said security is important not only for Suriname but for South Dakota as well, because one of the goals of the partnership program is to promote democracy and global stability.

"What struck me the most and is crystal clear are the commitments of the people of South Dakota. They are more than ready to execute this partnership," said Suriname Ambassador Jacques Kross. "I would like to thank the participants from both sides for broadening and deepening our insights."

Kross's appreciation was echoed by Ambassador Henry MacDonald, the Suriname ambassador to the United Nations.

"This was one of the best seminars I have gone to," said MacDonald. "But one of the most important things to see is the cooperation between South Dakota and Suriname in the tourism sector, because I see eco-tourism in Suriname being very interesting for South Dakotans."

SURINAME - Information provided by the U.S. Department of State

- **Location:** Northern coast of South America
- **Population:** 492,829 (2004 census)
- **Nationality:** *Noun* -Surinamer(s) *Adjective* – Surinamese
- **Ethnic Groups:** Hindustani (East Indian) 27%, Creole 18%, Javanese 15%, Maroon 15%, Mixed 12.5%, Amerindians 3.7%, Chinese 1.8% (percentage from 2004 census)
- **Religion:** Hindu, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed, Moravian, several other Christian denominations, Jewish, Baha'i
- **Government:** Constitutional democracy,
- **Constitution:** September 30, 1997
- **Independence:** November 25, 1975 (from Netherlands)

- ***Principal Government Officials:*** President Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan and Vice President Ramdien Sardjoe
- ***Literacy:*** 90%
- ***Languages:*** Dutch (official), English, Sranan Tongo (Creole language), Hindustani, Javanese
- ***Total Area of Land and Water:*** 63,037 sq. miles (South Dakota is 77,123 sq. miles)
- ***Capital:*** Paramaribo (population is approximately 243,500)
- ***Terrain:*** Rain forest, savanna, coastal swamps, hills
- ***Climate:*** Tropical

FOR MORE INFORMATION or to find out more about participating in the S.D. State Partnership Program, please contact Maj. Orson Ward, SDNG PAO, at (605) 737-6721, cell (605) 431-8753 or Lt. Col. Tracy Settle at (605) 737-6771.

More information on the state of South Dakota and the country of Suriname can be found at the following two web sites.

State of South Dakota Web Site:

<http://www.state.sd.us/factpage.htm>

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs Web Site,
Background Note: Suriname

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1893.htm>

Photo cut line:

071107-A-5701M-016 - Lt. Gov. Dennis Daugaard (right) welcomes Ambassador Henry MacDonald, the Suriname ambassador to the United Nations, to South Dakota as Maj. Gen. Steven Doohen, adjutant general for the South Dakota National Guard, hosts the South Dakota State Partnership Program Educational Workshop. Army National Guard Photo by 1st Sgt. Donald Matthews. (Released)

Link to photo: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/released/071107-A-5701M-016.jpg>